

Qualitative research workshop

Assoc. Prof. Melanie Bryant
Swinburne University of Technology



Two key pieces of advice

1. Clear and defensible research design
2. Using the “appropriate” rules for qualitative research

1. Clear and defensible research design

- The research design needs to be driven by the research question(s)
 - What are you setting out to achieve?
 - How does the structure/intent/wording of the research question lend itself to a particular approach?

1. Clear and defensible research design

- What elements of the research design have you included:
 - Ontology - *how do we see reality?*
 - Epistemology – *how to we go about obtaining knowledge?*
 - Methodology – *the strategy of inquiry*
 - Methods – *how we collect the data*
 - Data analysis – *methods used to analyse the data*
- Do the different elements above fit together?
- Do all of these elements fit the research question?

An example of a research design

Research questions

1. How do members of operating teams interact and communicate with each other?
2. What contributes to the communication climates in different operating theatres?
3. Do interprofessional values exist in theatre teams. If so, how do they impact on the behaviour and interactions of operating theatre team members?

Research site: operating theatres in general, vascular and orthopaedic surgery; compare one metropolitan and one regional hospital site

Participants: surgeons, registrars, nursing staff (scrub, scout and anaesthetic), team leaders, theatre technicians, patient

Ontology: Social constructionist

Epistemology: Interpretivist

Methodology: Ethnography

Methods of data collection:

1. Observations (approximately 20 hours in theatre in each of the two sites);
2. Semi-structured interviews to follow up and clarify findings from observations (include questions about medical jargon, differences in procedure amongst team leaders etc)

Data analysis: axial and open coding of observation notes and interviews; field notes (which includes details of informal conversations with staff; analytic memos; recording of personal experiences, context); thematic analysis

2. Using the “appropriate” rules for qualitative research

- A common mistake in qualitative research is the use of inappropriate criteria to judge the quality of qualitative work
 - There is not a uniform perspective, or a “one size fits all” approach
 - Use of quantitative terms such as reliability, validity, objectivity, measurability, representativeness & generalizability
 - Qualitative studies use terms such as authenticity, trustworthiness, reflexivity, particularity, subjectivity, evocative criteria etc.
 - For example traditional scientific criteria (positivism); social constructionist; critical theory ...

Using the appropriate rules – a comparison

Approach	Examples of “rules”
<i>Traditional scientific criteria (positivism)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objectivity/minimising bias• Validity of data• Reliability of coding and data• Generalisability/external validity• Evidence to support hypotheses
<i>Social constructionism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subjectivity – takes “biases” and differing views into account• Trustworthiness• Authenticity• Reflexivity• Embraces unique cases• Seeks to engage dialogue rather than an agreeable truth
<i>Critical theory</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can seek to critique society to change the balance of power• Often includes a specific agenda to bring about social change• Engages in a collaborative and participatory approach with those considered by society to be less powerful• Builds capacity of those involved to take action• Quality is based upon whether the research meets the philosophical agenda rather than issues such as validity, authenticity etc.